Maltese language

Maltese (Maltese: *Malti*) is a Semitic language spoken by the Maltese people of Malta. It is the national language of the country[3] and also serves as an official language of the European Union, the only Semitic language so distinguished. Maltese is a Latinised variety of spoken historical Arabic through its descent from Siculo-Arabic, which developed as a Maghrebi Arabic dialect during the Emirate of Sicily between 831 and 1091.[4] As a result of the Norman invasion of Malta and the subsequent re-Christianisation of the island, Maltese evolved independently of Classical Arabic in a gradual process of Latinisation.[5][6] It is therefore exceptional as a variety of historical Arabic that has no diglossic relationship with Classical or Modern Standard Arabic.[7] Maltese is thus classified separately from the 30 varieties constituting the modern Arabic macrolanguage.[8] Maltese is also distinguished from Arabic and other Semitic languages since its morphology has been deeply influenced by Romance languages, namely Italian and Sicilian.[9]

The original Arabic base comprises around one-third of the Maltese vocabulary, especially words that denote basic ideas and the function words,[10] but about half of the vocabulary is derived from standard Italian and Sicilian;[11] and English words make up between 6% and 20% of the vocabulary.[12] A 2016 study shows that, in terms of basic everyday language, speakers of Maltese are able to understand around a third of what is said to them in Tunisian Arabic,[13] which is a Maghrebi Arabic related to Siculo-Arabic,[14] whereas speakers of Tunisian Arabic are able to understand about 40% of what is said to them in Maltese.[15] This reported level of asymmetric intelligibility is considerably lower than the mutual intelligibility found between other varieties of Arabic.[16]

Maltese has always been written in the Latin script, the earliest surviving example dating from the late Middle Ages.[17] It continues to be the only standardised Semitic language written exclusively in the Latin script.[18]

Maltese	
Malti	
Native to	Malta
Native speakers	520,000 (2012)[1]
Language family	Afro-Asiatic
	▪ Semitic
	▪ West Semitic
	▪ Central Semitic
	▪ North Arabian
	▪ Old Arabic
	▪ Classical Arabic
	▪ Maghrebi Arabic
	▪ Siculo-Arabic
	▪ **Maltese**
Writing system	Latin (Maltese alphabet) Maltese Braille
Official status	
Official language in	Malta *European Union*
Regulated by	National Council for the Maltese Language *Il-Kunsill Nazzjonali tal-Ilsien Malti*
Language codes	
ISO 639-1	mt (https://www.loc.gov/standards/iso639-2/php/langcodes_name.php?iso_639_1=mt)
ISO 639-2	mlt (https://www.loc.gov/standard

Contents

	s/iso639-2/php/langcodes_name.php?code_ID=298)
ISO 639-3	mlt
Glottolog	malt1254 (http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/malt1254)[2]
Linguasphere	12-AAC-c

Play media
A Maltese speaker recorded for Wikitongues

History

The origins of the Maltese language are attributed to the arrival, early in the eleventh century, of settlers from neighbouring Sicily, where Siculo-Arabic was spoken, following the Fatimid Caliphate's conquest of the island at the end of the ninth century.[19] This claim has been corroborated by genetic studies, which show that contemporary Maltese people share common ancestry with Sicilians and Calabrians, with little genetic input from North Africa and the Levant.[20][21]

The Norman conquest in 1091, followed by the expulsion of the Muslims—complete by 1249—permanently isolated the vernacular from its Arabic source, creating the conditions for its evolution into a distinct language.[19] In contrast to Sicily—where Siculo-Arabic became extinct and replaced by Sicilian—the vernacular in Malta continued to develop alongside Italian, eventually replacing it as official language in 1934 – alongside English.[19] The first written reference to the Maltese language is in a will of 1436, where it is called *lingua maltensi*. The oldest known document in Maltese, *Il-Kantilena* (*Xidew il-Qada*) by Pietru Caxaro, dates from the 15th century.[22]

The earliest known Maltese dictionary was a 16th-century manuscript entitled "Maltese-Italiano"; it was included in the *Biblioteca Maltese* of Mifsud in 1764, but is now lost.[23] A list of Maltese words was included in both the *Thesaurus Polyglottus* (1603) and *Propugnaculum Europae* (1606) of Hieronymus Megiser, who had visited Malta in 1588–1589; Domenico Magri gave the etymologies of some Maltese words in his *Hierolexicon, sive sacrum dictionarium* (1677).[22]

An early manuscript dictionary, *Dizionario Italiano e Maltese*, was discovered in the Biblioteca Vallicelliana in Rome in the 1980s, together with a grammar, the *Regole per la Lingua Maltese*, attributed to a French Knight named Thezan.[23][24] The first systematic lexicon is that of Giovanni Pietro Francesco Agius de Soldanis, who also wrote the first systematic grammar of the language and proposed a standard orthography.[23]
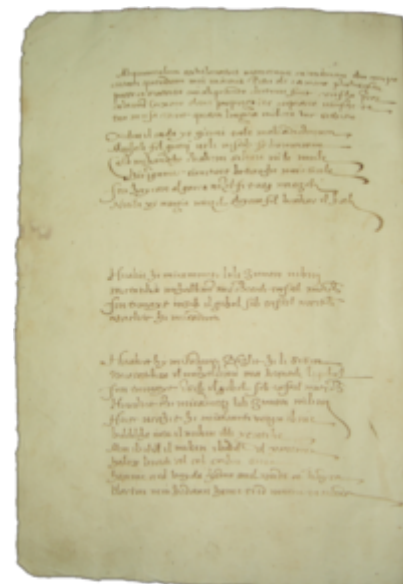
Oldest Maltese text: *Il-Kantilena* by Pietru Caxaro, 15th century

Demographics

SIL Ethnologue (2015) reports a total of 522,000 Maltese speakers, with 371,000 residing in Malta (close to 90% of Maltese population) according to the European Commission (2012).[1] This implies a number of some 150,000 speakers in the Maltese diaspora. Most speakers are bilingual, the majority of speakers (345,000) regularly use English, and a reported 66,800 regularly use French.[1]

The largest diaspora community of Maltese speakers is in Australia, with 36,000 speakers reported in 2006 (down from 45,000 in 1996, and expected to decline further).[25]

The Maltese linguistic community in Tunisia originates in the 18th century. Numbering at several thousand in the 19th century, it was reported at only 100 to 200 people as of 2017.[26]

Classification

Maltese is descended from Siculo-Arabic, a Semitic language within the Afroasiatic family,[27] that in the course of its history has been influenced by Sicilian and Italian, to a lesser extent French, and more recently English. Today, the core vocabulary (including both the most commonly used vocabulary and function words) is Semitic, with large numbers of loanwords.[11] Because of the Sicilian influence on Siculo-Arabic, Maltese has many language contact features and is most commonly described as a language with a large number of loanwords.[28]

The Maltese language has historically been classified in various ways, with some claiming that the ancient Punic language (another Semitic language) was its origin instead of Siculo-Arabic,[22][29][30] while others believed the language to be one of the Berber languages (another family within Afroasiatic),[22] and under the Fascist Kingdom of Italy, it was classified as regional Italian.[31]

Dialects

SIL reports six varieties, besides Standard Maltese: Gozo, Port Maltese, Rural Central Maltese, Rural East Maltese, Rural West Maltese, and Zurrieq.[1]

Urban varieties of Maltese are closer to Standard Maltese than rural varieties,[32] which have some characteristics that distinguish them from Standard Maltese. They tend to show some archaic features[32] such as the realisation of ⟨kh⟩ and ⟨gh⟩ and the imāla of Arabic ā into ē (or ī especially in Gozo), considered archaic because they are reminiscent of 15th-century transcriptions of this sound.[32] Another archaic feature is the realisation of Standard Maltese ā as ō in rural dialects.[32] There is also a tendency to diphthongise simple vowels, e.g., ū becomes eo or eu.[32] Rural dialects also tend to employ more Semitic roots and broken plurals than Standard Maltese.[32] In general, rural Maltese is less distant from its Siculo-Arabic ancestor than Standard Maltese.[32]

Phonology

Consonants

Consonant phonemes[33][34]

	Labial	Dental/ Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Pharyngeal	Glottal
Nasal	m	n				
Plosive	p b	t d		k g		ʔ
Affricate		t͡s d͡z	t͡ʃ d͡ʒ			
Fricative	f v	s z	ʃ ʒ		ħ	
Trill		r				
Approximant		l	j	w		

Voiceless stops are only lightly aspirated and voiced stops are fully voiced. Voicing is carried over from the last segment in obstruent clusters; thus, two- and three-obstruent clusters are either voiceless or voiced throughout, e.g. /niktbu/ is realised [ˈniɡdbu] "we write". Maltese has final-obstruent devoicing of voiced obstruents and voiceless stops have no audible release, making voiceless–voiced pairs phonetically indistinguishable.[35]

Gemination is distinctive word-medially and word-finally in Maltese. The distinction is most rigid intervocalically after a stressed vowel. Stressed, word-final closed syllables with short vowels end in a long consonant, and those with a long vowel in a single consonant; the only exception is where historic *ʕ and *ɣ meant the compensatory lengthening of the succeeding vowel. Some speakers have lost length distinction in clusters.[36]

The two nasals /m/ and /n/ assimilate for place of articulation in clusters.[37] /t/ and /d/ are usually dental, whereas /t͡s d͡z s z n r l/ are all alveolar. /t͡s d͡z/ are found mostly in words of Italian origin, retaining length (if not word-initial).[38] /d͡z/ and /ʒ/ are only found in loanwords, e.g. /ɡad͡zd͡zɛtta/ "newspaper" and /tɛlɛˈviʒin/ "television".[39] The pharyngeal fricative /ħ/ is velar ([x]) or glottal ([h]) for some speakers.[40]

Vowels

Maltese has five short vowels, /ɐ ɛ ɪ ɔ ʊ/, written *a e i o u;* six long vowels, /ɐː ɛː ɪː iː ɔː ʊː/, written *a, e, ie, i, o, u,* all of which (with the exception of *ie* /ɪː/) can only be known to represent long vowels in writing if they are followed by an orthographic *għ* or *h* (otherwise, one needs to know the pronunciation;

e.g. *nar* (fire) is pronounced /naːr/); and seven diphthongs, /eɪ ɐʊ ɛɪ ɛʊ ɪʊ ɔɪ ɔʊ/, written *aj* or *għi*, *aw* or *għu, ej* or *għi, ew, iw, oj,* and *ow* or *għu*.[41]

Stress

Stress is generally on the penultimate syllable, unless some other syllable is heavy (has a long vowel or final consonant), or unless a stress-shifting suffix is added. (Suffixes marking gender, possession, and verbal plurals do not cause the stress to shift). Historically when vowel *a* and *u* were long or stressed they were written as *â* or *û*, for example in the word *baħħâr* (sailor) to differentiate form *baħħar* (to sail), but nowadays these accents are mostly omitted.

When two syllables are equally heavy, the penultimate takes the stress, but otherwise the heavier syllable does, e.g. *bajjad* [ˈbɐj.jɐt] 'he painted' vs *bajjad* [bɐj.ˈjɐːt] 'a painter'.

Historical phonology

Many Classical Arabic consonants underwent mergers and modifications in Maltese:
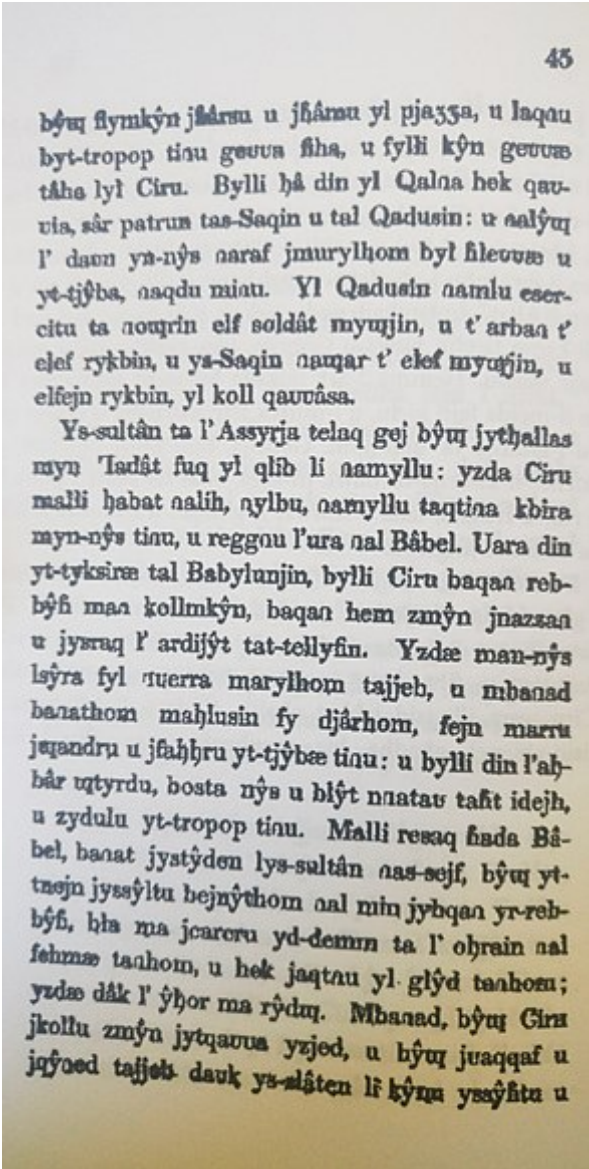
Vassalli's *Storja tas-Sultân Ċiru* (1831), is an example of Maltese orthography in the 19th century, before the later standardisation introduced in 1924. Note the similarities with the various varieties of romanized Arabic.

Classical Arabic	ت /t/	ث /θ/	ط /tˤ/	د /d/	ض /dˤ/	ذ / ظ / ð/	ا ظ /ðˤ/	س /s/	ص /sˤ/	ح /ħ/	خ /χ/	ع /ʕ/	غ /ɣ/	ق /q/	ه /h/
Maltese	/t/			/d/				/s/		/ħ/		/ʕːˈ/		/ ʔ~k/	not pronounced

Orthography

Alphabet

The modern system of Maltese orthography was introduced in 1924.[42] Below is the Maltese alphabet, with IPA symbols and approximate English pronunciation:

Letter	Name	IPA (Alphabet Name(s))	Maltese example	IPA (orthographically representing)	Approximate English pronunciation
A a	a	aː	anġlu (angel)	ɐ, aː, æː	similar to 'u' in n**u**t in RP [aː] similar to f**a**ther in Irish English [æː] similar to cat in American English, in some dialects it may be [ɒː] in some locations as in wh**a**t in some American English Dialects
B b	be	beː	ballun (ball)	b	**b**ar, but at the end of a word it is devoiced to [p].
Ċ ċ	ċe	t͡ʃeː	ċavetta (key)	t͡ʃ	**ch**urch (note: undotted 'c' has been replaced by 'k', so when 'c' does appear, it is to be spoken the same way as 'ċ')
D d	de	deː	dar (home)	d	**d**ay, but at the end of a word it is devoiced to [t].
E e	e	eː	envelopp (envelope)	eː, ɛ, øː, ə	[eː] somewhat like b**ee**t in some English dialects/French é when long [ɛ] **e**nd when short ,it is often changed to [øː, œ] when following and more often when followed by a *w*, when at the end in an unstressed syllable it is pronounced as schwa [ə, Vᵊ] butt**e**r
F f	effe	ɛf(ː)ᵊ	fjura (flower)	f	**f**ar
Ġ ġ	ġe	d͡ʒøː	ġelat (ice cream)	d͡ʒ	**g**em, but at the end of a word it is devoiced to [tʃ].
G g	ge	geː	gallettina (biscuit)	g	**g**ame, but at the end of a word it is devoiced to [k].
GĦ għ	ajn	ajn, æːn	għasfur (bird)	(ˤ)ː, ħː	has the effect of lengthening and pharyngealising associated vowels *(għi* and *għu* are [ɨ̰(ˤ)j] (may be transcribed as [ə(ˤ)j]) and [oˤ]). When found at the end of a word or immediately before 'h' it has the sound of a double 'ħ' (see below).
H h	akka	ak(ː)ɐ	hu (he)		not pronounced unless it is at the end of a word, in which case it has the sound of 'ħ'.
Ħ ħ	ħe	ħeː, heː, xeː	ħanut (shop)	ħ	no English equivalent; sounds similar to /h/ but is articulated with a lowered larynx.
I i	i	iː	ikel (food)	ɨ̰ː, iː, ɪ	[ɨ̰ː] b**i**te(the way commonly realized in Irish English or [iː] in other words as b**ee**t but more forward) and when short as [ɪ] b**i**t, occasionally 'i' is used to display il-vokali tal-leħen(the vowel of the voice) as in words like *l-iskola* or *l-iMdina* ,in this case it takes the schwa sound.
IE ie	ie	iːᵊ, ɛː	ieqaf (stop)	ɛː, iːᵊ	sounds similar to /ie/, as in y**ie**ld, but opened up slightly towards /ɛ/ some English dialects may produce this sound when realizing words that have *ea* as in d**ea**d or m**ea**t
J j	je	jə, jæ, jɛ	jum (day)	j	**y**ard
K k	ke	kə, kæ, kɛ	kelb (dog)	k	**k**ettle

L l	elle	ɛl(ː)ᵊ	libsa (dress)	l	**l**ine
M m	emme	ɛm(ː)ᵊ	mara (woman)	m	**m**arch
N n	enne	ɛn(ː)ᵊ	nanna (granny)	n	**n**ext
O o	o	oː	ors (bear)	o, ɔ, ɒ	[o] as in somewhere between similar to Scottish English o in n**o** [ɔ] like 'aw' in <u>RP</u> l**aw**, but short or [ɒ] as in w**a**ter in some American dialects.
P p	pe	peː, pə	paġna (page, sheet)	p	**p**art
Q q	qe	ʔø, ʔ(ʷ)ɛ, ʔ(ʷ)æ, ʔ(ʷ)ə	qattus (cat)	ʔ	glottal stop, found in the Cockney English pronunciation of "bo**tt**le" or the phrase "uh-oh" /ʔʌʔoʊ/.
R r	erre	ɛɹ(ː)ᵊ, æɹ(ː)ᵊ, ɚ(ː)ᵊ or ɛr(ː)ᵊ, ær(ː)ᵊ, ər(ː)ᵊ	re (king)	r, ɹ	[r] as in General American English Bu**tt**er ,or ɹ **r**oad (r realization changes depending on dialect or location in the word)
S s	esse	ɛs(ː)ᵊ	<u>sliem</u> (peace)	s	**s**and
T t	te	teː	tieqa (window)	t	**t**ired
U u	u	uː, ʉ	uviera (egg cup)	u, ʉ, ʊ	[u] as in General American English b**oo**t or in some dialects it may be realized as [ʉ] as in some American English realizations of st**u**dent, short *u* is [ʊ] p**u**t
V v	ve	vøː, veː, və	vjola (violet)	v	**v**ast, but at the end of a word it is devoiced to [f] may be said as [w] in the word *Iva*(yes) sometimes this is just written as *Iwa*.
W w	ve doppja /u doppja/we	vedɒp(ː)je, uːdɒp(ː)je, wøː	widna (ear)	w	**w**est
X x	xe	ʃə, ʃøː	xadina (monkey)	ʃ / ʒ	**sh**ade, sometimes as mea**s**ure; when doubled the sound is elongated, as in "Ca**sh sh**in" vs. "Ca**sh** in".
Z z	ze	t͡sə, t͡søː, t͡seːt(e)	zalza (sauce)	t͡s / d͡z	pi**zz**a
Ż ż	że/żeta	zə, zøː, zeːt(e)	żraben (shoes)	z	ma**z**e, but at the end of a word it is devoiced to [s].

Final vowels with grave accents (à, è, ì, ò, ù) are also found in some Maltese words of Italian origin, such as *libertà* ("freedom"), *sigurtà* (old Italian: *sicurtà,* "security"), or *soċjetà* (Italian: *società,* "society").

The official rules governing the structure of the Maltese language are found in the official guidebook issued by the *Akkademja tal-Malti*, the Academy of the Maltese language, which is named *Tagħrif fuq il-Kitba Maltija*, that is, *Knowledge on Writing in Maltese*. The first edition of this book was printed in 1924 by the Maltese government's printing press. The rules were further expanded in the 1984 book, *iż-Żieda mat-Tagħrif*, which focused mainly on the increasing influence of Romance and English words. In 1992 the Academy issued the *Aġġornament tat-Tagħrif fuq il-Kitba Maltija*, which updated the previous works.[43] All these works were included in a revised and expanded guidebook published in 1996.

The National Council for the Maltese Language (KNM) is the main regulator of the Maltese language (see Maltese Language Act, below) and not the *Akkademja tal-Malti*. However, these orthography rules are still valid and official.

Written Maltese

Since Maltese evolved after the Italo-Normans ended Arab rule of the islands, a written form of the language was not developed for a long time after the Arabs' expulsion in the middle of the thirteenth century. Under the rule of the Knights Hospitaller, both French and Italian were used for official documents and correspondence. During the British colonial period, the use of English was encouraged through education, with Italian regarded as the next-most important language.

In the late eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth century, philologists and academics such as Mikiel Anton Vassalli made a concerted effort to standardise written Maltese. Many examples of written Maltese exist from before this period, always in the Latin alphabet, *Il Cantilena* being the earliest example of written Maltese. In 1934, Maltese was recognised as an official language.

Sample

The Maltese language has a tendency to have both Semitic vocabulary and also vocabulary derived from Romance languages, primarily Italian. Below are two versions of the same translations, one in vocabulary derived mostly from Semitic root words while the other uses Romance loanwords (from the *Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe (http://europa.eu/eu-law/decision-making/treaties/pdf/treaty_establishing_a_constitution_for_europe/treaty_establishing_a_constitution_for_europe_mt.pdf)*, see p. 17 (https://op.europa.eu/mt/publication-detail/-/publication/3c32722f-0136-4d8f-a03e-bfaf70d16349)):

English	Maltese (Semitic vocabulary)	Maltese (Romance vocabulary)
The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.	L-Għaqda hija mibnija fuq is-siwi ta' għadir għall-ġieħ il-bniedem, ta' ħelsien, ta' għażil il-ġemgħa, ta' ndaqs bejn il-ġnus, tas-saltna tad-dritt* u tal-għadir għall-ħaqq tal-bniedem, wkoll il-ħaqq ta' wħud li huma f'minoranzi*. Dan is-siwi huwa mqassam bejn il-Pajjiżi* Msieħba, f'nies li tħaddan il-kotrija, li ma tgħejjibx, li ddann, li tgħaqqad u li tiżen indaqs in-nisa u l-irġiel.	L-Unjoni hija mibnija fuq il-valuri ta' rispett għad-dinjità tal-bniedem, ta' libertà, ta' demokrazija, ta' ugwaljanza, ta' l-istat tad-dritt u tar-rispett għad-drittijiet tal-bniedem, inklużi d-drittijiet ta' persuni li jagħmlu parti minn minoranzi. Dawn il-valuri huma komuni għall-Istati Membri f'soċjetà karatterizzata mill-pluraliżmu, in-non-diskriminazzjoni, it-tolleranza, il-ġustizzja, is-solidarjetà u l-ugwaljanza bejn in-nisa u l-irġiel.

*Note: the words *dritt* (pl. *drittijiet*), *minoranza* (pl. *minoranzi*), *pajjiż* (pl *pajjiżi*) are derived from *diritto* (right), *minoranza* (minority) and *paese* (county) respectively.

Vocabulary

Although the original vocabulary of the language was Siculo-Arabic, it has incorporated a large number of borrowings from Romance sources of influence (Sicilian, Italian, and French), and more recently Germanic ones (from English).[44]

The historical source of modern Maltese vocabulary is 52% Italian/Sicilian, 32% Siculo-Arabic, and 6% English, with some of the remainder being French.[11][45] Today, most function words are Semitic. In this way, it is similar to English, which is a Germanic language that had large influence from Norman French. As a result of this, Romance language-speakers may easily be able to comprehend conceptual ideas expressed in Maltese, such as "Ġeografikament, l-Ewropa hi parti tas-superkontinent ta' l-Ewrasja" (*Geographically, Europe is part of the Supercontinent of Eurasia*), while not understanding a single word of a functional sentence such as "Ir-raġel qiegħed fid-dar" (*The man is in the house*), which would be easily understood by any Arabic speaker.

Romance

An analysis of the etymology of the 41,000 words in Aquilina's *Maltese-English Dictionary* shows that words of Romance origin make up 52% of the Maltese vocabulary,[11] although other sources claim from as low as 40%,[12] to as high as 55%. These vocabularies tend to deal with more complicated concepts. They are mostly derived from Sicilian and thus exhibit Sicilian phonetic characteristics, such as /u/ in place of /o/, and /i/ in place of /e/ (e.g. *tiatru* not *teatro* and *fidi* not *fede*). Also, as with Old Sicilian, /ʃ/ (English 'sh') is written 'x' and this produces spellings such as: *ambaxxata* /ambaʃˈaːta/ ('embassy'), *xena* /ˈʃeːna/ ('scene' cf. Italian *ambasciata, scena*).

Maltese	Sicilian	Italian	English
skola	scola	scuola	school
gvern	cuvernu	governo	government
repubblika	ripùbblica	repubblica	republic
re	re	re	king (Germanic)
natura	natura	natura	nature
pulizija	pulizzìa	polizia	police
ċentru	centru	centro	centre
teatru	tiatru	teatro	theatre

A tendency in modern Maltese is to adopt further influences from English and Italian. Complex Latinate English words adopted into Maltese are often given Italianate or Sicilianate forms,[11] even if the resulting words do not appear in either of those languages. For instance, the words "*evaluation*", "*industrial action*", and "*chemical armaments*" become "*evalwazzjoni*", "*azzjoni industrjali*", and "*armamenti kimiċi*" in Maltese, while the Italian terms are *valutazione*, *vertenza sindacale*, and *armi chimiche* respectively. English words of Germanic origin are generally preserved relatively unchanged.

Some impacts of African Romance on Arabic and Berber spoken in the Maghreb are theorised, which may then have passed into Maltese.[46] For example, in calendar month names, the word *furar* "February" is only found in the Maghreb and in Maltese - proving the word's ancient origins. The region also has a form of another Latin named month in *awi/ussu < augustus*.[46] This word does not appear to be a loan word through Arabic, and may have been taken over directly from Late Latin or African Romance.[46] Scholars theorise that a Latin-based system provided forms such as *awi/ussu* and *furar* in African Romance, with the system then mediating Latin/Romance names through Arabic for some month names during the Islamic period.[47] The same situation exists for Maltese which mediated words from Italian, and retains both non-Italian forms such as *awissu/awwissu* and *frar*, and Italian forms such as *april*.[47]

Siculo-Arabic

Siculo-Arabic is the ancestor of the Maltese language,[11] and supplies between 32%[11] and 40%[12] of the language's vocabulary.

Maltese	Siculo-Arabic (in Sicilian)	Arabic	English
bebbuxu	*babbaluciu*	بوش (*babbūš*) (Moroccan)	snail
ġiebja	*gebbia*	جب (*jabb*)	cistern
ġunġlien	*giuggiulena*	جنجلان (*junjulān*)	sesame seed
saqqajja	*saia*	ساقية (*sāqiyyah*)	canal
kenur	*tanura*	تنور (*tannūr*)	oven
żagħfran	*zaffarana*	زعفران (*zaʿfarān*)	saffron
żahra	*zagara*	زهرة (*zahrah*)	blossom
żbib	*zibbibbu*	زبيب (*zabīb*)	raisins
zokk	*zuccu*	ساق (*sāq*)	tree trunk
tebut	*tabbutu*	تابوت (*tābūt*)	coffin
kapunata	*caponata*	*(non-Arabic origin)*	*caponata*
qassata	*cassata*		savoury pastry pie

Żammit (2000) found that 40% of a sample of 1,821 Quranic Arabic roots were found in Maltese, a lower percentage than found in Moroccan (58%) and Lebanese Arabic (72%).[48] An analysis of the etymology of the 41,000 words in Aquilina's *Maltese-English Dictionary* shows that 32% of the Maltese vocabulary is of Arabic origin,[11] although another source claims 40%.[12][49] Usually, words expressing basic concepts and ideas, such as *raġel* (man), *mara* (woman), *tifel* (boy), *dar* (house), *xemx* (sun), *sajf* (summer), are of Arabic origin. Moreover, *belles lettres* in Maltese tend to aim mainly at diction belonging to this group.[32]

The Maltese language has merged many of the original Arabic consonants, in particular the emphatic consonants, with others that are common in European languages. Thus, original Arabic /d/, /ð/, and /dˤ/ all merged into Maltese /d/. The vowels, however, separated from the three in Arabic (/a i u/) to five, as is more typical of other European languages (/a ɛ i o u/). Some unstressed short vowels have been elided. The common Arabic greeting *as salāmu 'alaykum* is cognate with *is-sliem għalikom* in Maltese (lit. *the peace for you*, peace be with you), as are similar greetings in other Semitic languages (e.g. *shalom ʿalekhem* in Hebrew).

Since the attested vocabulary of Siculo-Arabic is limited, the following table compares cognates in Maltese and some other varieties of Arabic (all forms are written phonetically, as in the source):[50]

Maltese	Cairene	Damascene	Iraqi (Jewish Baghdad)	Negev (bedouin)	Yemenite (Sanaani)	Moroccan	Modern Standard Arabic	English
qalb	*'alb*	*'aleb*	*qalb*	*galb*	*galb*	*qalb*	قلب (qalb)	heart
waqt	*wa't*	*wa'et*	—	*wagt*	*wagt*	*waqt*	وقت (waqt)	time
qamar	*'amar*	*'amar*	*qamaɣ*	*gumar*	*gamar*	*qmar*	قمر (qamar)	moon
kelb	*kalb*	*kaleb*	*kalb*	*čalb*	*kalb*	*kalb*	كلب (kalb)	dog

English

It is estimated that English loanwords, which are becoming more commonplace, make up 20% of the Maltese vocabulary,[12] although other sources claim amounts as low as 6%.[11] This percentage discrepancy is due to the fact that a number of new English loanwords are sometimes not officially considered part of the Maltese vocabulary; hence, they are not included in certain dictionaries.[11] Also, English loanwards of Latinate origin are very often Italianised, as discussed above. English loanwords are generally transliterated, although standard English pronunciation is virtually always retained. Below are a few examples:

Maltese	English
futbol	football
baskitbol	basketball
klabb	club
friġġ	fridge

Note "fridge", which is a slang term derived from "refrigerator", a Latinate word which might be expected to be rendered as *rifriġeratori* (Italian uses two different words: *frigorifero* or *refrigeratore*).

Grammar

Maltese grammar is fundamentally derived from Siculo-Arabic, although Romance and English noun pluralisation patterns are also used on borrowed words.

Adjectives and adverbs

Adjectives follow nouns. There are no separately formed native adverbs, and word order is fairly flexible. Both nouns and adjectives of Semitic origin take the definite article (for example, *It-tifel il-kbir*, lit. "The boy the elder"="The elder boy"). This rule does not apply to adjectives of Romance origin.

Nouns

Nouns are pluralised and also have a dual marker. Semitic plurals are complex; if they are regular, they are marked by *-iet/-ijiet*, e.g., *art, artijiet* "lands (territorial possessions or property)" (cf. Arabic *-at* and Hebrew *-ot/-oth*) or *-in* (cf. Arabic *-īn* and Hebrew *-im*). If irregular, they fall in the *pluralis fractus* category, in which a word is pluralised by internal vowel changes: *ktieb, kotba* " book", "books"; *raġel, irġiel* "man", "men".

Words of Romance origin are usually pluralised in two manners: addition of *-i* or *-jiet*. For example, *lingwa, lingwi* "languages", from Sicilian *lingua, lingui*.

Words of English origin are pluralised by adding either an "-s" or "-jiet", for example, *friġġ, friġis* from the word *fridge*. Some words can be pluralised with either of the suffixes to denote the plural. A few words borrowed from English can amalgamate both suffixes, like *brikksa* from the English *brick*, which can adopt either collective form *brikks* or the plural form *brikksiet*.

Article

The proclitic *il-* is the definite article, equivalent to "the" in English and "al-" in Arabic.

The Maltese article becomes *l-* before or after a vowel.

- *l-omm* (the mother)
- *rajna l-Papa* (we saw the Pope)
- *il-missier* (the father)

The Maltese article assimilates to a following coronal consonant (called *konsonanti xemxin* "sun consonants"), namely:

- Ċ *iċ-ċikkulata* (the chocolate)
- D *id-dar* (the house)
- N *in-nar* (the fire)
- R *ir-razzett* (the farm)
- S *is-serrieq* (the saw)
- T *it-tifel* (the boy)
- X *ix-xemx* (the sun)
- Ż *iż-żarbuna* (the shoe)
- Z *iz-zalzett* (the sausage)

Maltese *il-* is coincidentally identical in pronunciation to one of the Italian masculine articles, *il*,. Consequently, many nouns borrowed from Standard Italian did not change their original article when used in Maltese. Romance vocabulary taken from Sicilian did change where the Sicilian articles *u* and *a*, before a consonant, are used. In spite of its Romance appearance, *il-* is related to the Arabic article *al-*.

Verbs

Verbs show a triliteral Semitic pattern, in which a verb is conjugated with prefixes, suffixes, and infixes (for example *ktibna*, Arabic *katabna*, Hebrew *kathabhnu* (Modern Hebrew: katavnu) "we wrote"). There are two tenses: present and perfect. The Maltese verb system incorporates Romance verbs and adds Maltese suffixes and prefixes to them (for example, *iddeċidejna* "we decided" ← *(i)ddeċieda* "decide", a Romance verb + *-ejna*, a Maltese first person plural perfect marker).

Media

With Malta being a multilingual country, the usage of Maltese in the mass media is shared with other European languages, namely English and Italian. The majority of television stations broadcast from Malta in English or Maltese, although broadcasts from Italy in Italian are also received on the islands. Similarly, there are more Maltese-language radio programs than English ones broadcast from Malta, but again, as with television, Italian broadcasts are also picked up. Maltese generally receives equal usage in newspaper periodicals to English.

By early 2000s, the use of the Maltese language on the Internet is uncommon, and the number of websites written in Maltese are few. In a survey of Maltese cultural websites conducted in 2004 on behalf of the Maltese Government, 12 of 13 were in English only, while the remaining one was multilingual but did not include Maltese.[51]

Code-switching

The Maltese population, being fluent in both Maltese and English, displays code-switching (referred to as Maltenglish) in certain localities and between certain social groups.[11]

See also

- Languages of Malta
- Maltese people

Notes

1. Maltese (https://www.ethnologue.com/18/language/mlt/) at *Ethnologue* (18th ed., 2015)
2. Hammarström, Harald; Forkel, Robert; Haspelmath, Martin, eds. (2017). "Maltese" (http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/malt1254). *Glottolog 3.0*. Jena, Germany: Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History.
3. "Constitution of Malta" (http://www.justiceservices.gov.mt/DownloadDocument.aspx?app=lom&itemid=8566&l=1). Retrieved 3 December 2017.
4. *So who are the 'real' Maltese* (http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20140914/local/So-who-are-the-real-Maltese-.535578). Archived (https://web.archive.org/web/20160312063245/http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20140914/local/So-who-are-the-real-Maltese-.535578) from the original on 2016-03-12. "The kind of Arabic used in the Maltese language is most likely derived from the language spoken by those that repopulated the island from Sicily in the early second millennium; it is known as Siculo-Arab. The Maltese are mostly descendants of these people."
5. Borg and Azzopardi-Alexander, 1997 (1997). *Maltese*. Routledge. p. xiii. ISBN 978-0-415-02243-9. "In fact, Maltese displays some areal traits typical of Maghrebine Arabic, although over the past 800 years of independent evolution it has drifted apart from Tunisian Arabic"
6. Brincat (2005): "Originally Maltese was an Arabic dialect but it was immediately exposed to Latinisation because the Normans conquered the islands in 1090, while Christianisation, which was complete by 1250, cut off the dialect from contact with Classical Arabic. Consequently Maltese developed on its own, slowly but steadily absorbing new words from Sicilian and Italian according to the needs of the developing community."

7. Hoberman, Robert D. (2007). "Chapter 13: Maltese Morphology". In Kaye, Alan S. (ed.). *Morphologies of Asia and Africa* (https://books.google.com/?id=gaktTQ8vq28C&pg=PA257&lpg=PA257&dq=robert+d+hoberman+morphologies+of+Asia+and+Africa+Chapter+13#v=onepage&q=robert%20d%20hoberman%20morphologies%20of%20Asia%20and%20Africa%20Chapter%2013&f=false). **1**. Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrown. p. 258. ISBN 9781575061092. Archived (https://web.archive.org/web/20170930180345/https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=gaktTQ8vq28C&pg=PA257&lpg=PA257&dq=robert+d+hoberman+morphologies+of+Asia+and+Africa+Chapter+13&source=bl&ots=g5l67Yg1jh&sig=xKG6ccrdQbPeSXvT6yrMBZyjEfI&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwj4xanIz8zWAhVJb1AKHTcZCmIQ6AEIJjAA#v=onepage&q=robert%20d%20hoberman%20morphologies%20of%20Asia%20and%20Africa%20Chapter%2013&f=false) from the original on 2017-09-30. "Maltese is the chief exception: Classical or Standard Arabic is irrelevant in the Maltese linguistic community and there is no diglossia."

8. "Documentation for ISO 639 identifier: ara" (http://www-01.sil.org/iso639-3/documentation.asp?id=ara).

9. Hoberman, Robert D. (2007). "Chapter 13: Maltese Morphology". In Kaye, Alan S. (ed.). *Morphologies of Asia and Africa* (https://books.google.com/?id=gaktTQ8vq28C&pg=PA257&lpg=PA257&dq=robert+d+hoberman+morphologies+of+Asia+and+Africa+Chapter+13#v=onepage&q=robert%20d%20hoberman%20morphologies%20of%20Asia%20and%20Africa%20Chapter%2013&f=false). Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrown. pp. 257–258. ISBN 9781575061092. Archived (https://web.archive.org/web/20170930180345/https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=gaktTQ8vq28C&pg=PA257&lpg=PA257&dq=robert+d+hoberman+morphologies+of+Asia+and+Africa+Chapter+13&source=bl&ots=g5l67Yg1jh&sig=xKG6ccrdQbPeSXvT6yrMBZyjEfI&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwj4xanIz8zWAhVJb1AKHTcZCmIQ6AEIJjAA#v=onepage&q=robert%20d%20hoberman%20morphologies%20of%20Asia%20and%20Africa%20Chapter%2013&f=false) from the original on 2017-09-30. "yet it is in its morphology that Maltese also shows the most elaborate and deeply embedded influence from the Romance languages, Sicilian and Italian, with which it has long been in intimate contact….As a result Maltese is unique and different from Arabic and other Semitic languages."

10. Brincat (2005): "An analysis of the etymology of the 41,000 words in Aquilina's Maltese-English Dictionary shows that 32.41% are of Arabic origin, 52.46% are from Sicilian and Italian, and 6.12% are from English. Although nowadays we know that all languages are mixed to varying degrees, this is quite an unusual formula. However, the words derived from Arabic are more frequent because they denote the basic ideas and include the function words."

11. Brincat (2005).

12. "Languages across Europe - Maltese, Malti" (https://www.bbc.co.uk/languages/european_languages/languages/maltese.shtml). *BBC*. Archived (https://web.archive.org/web/20170913054653/http://www.bbc.co.uk/languages/european_languages/languages/maltese.shtml) from the original on 13 September 2017. Retrieved 12 January 2017.

13. "Mutual Intelligibility of Spoken Maltese, Libyan Arabic and Tunisian Arabic Functionally Tested: A Pilot Study" (https://docs.google.com/viewer?url=http%3A%2F%2Fling.auf.net%2Flingbuzz%2F002930%2Fcurrent.pdf&embedded=true&chrome=false&dov=1). p. 1. Retrieved 23 September 2017. "To summarise our findings, we might observe that when it comes to the most basic everyday language, as reflected in our data sets, speakers of Maltese are able to understand less than a third of what is being said to them in either Tunisian or Benghazi Libyan Arabic."

14. Borg, Albert J.; Azzopardi-Alexander, Marie (1997). *Maltese*. Routledge. ISBN 0-415-02243-6.

15. "Mutual Intelligibility of Spoken Maltese, Libyan Arabic and Tunisian Arabic Functionally Tested: A Pilot Study" (https://docs.google.com/viewer?url=http%3A%2F%2Fling.auf.net%2Flingbuzz%2F002930%2Fcurrent.pdf&embedded=true&chrome=false&dov=1). p. 1. Retrieved 23 September 2017. "Speakers of Tunisian and Libyan Arabic are able to understand about 40% of what is said to them in Maltese."

16. "Mutual Intelligibility of Spoken Maltese, Libyan Arabic and Tunisian Arabic Functionally Tested: A Pilot Study" (https://docs.google.com/viewer?url=http%3A%2F%2Fling.auf.net%2Flingbuzz%2F002930%2Fcurrent.pdf&embedded=true&chrome=false&dov=1). p. 1. Retrieved 23 September 2017. "In comparison, speakers of Libyan Arabic and speakers of Tunisian Arabic understand about two-thirds of what is being said to them."

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External links